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THE SANE WOMAN IN THE ATTIC:
SEXUALITY AND SELF-
AUTHORSHIP IN MRS. DALLOWAY

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Oddly enough, she [Clarissa] was one of the most thorough-going sceptics he [Peter] had ever met, and possibly . . . she said to herself, As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship . . . let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners; decorate the dungeon with flowers and air cushions . . . and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness.

—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

She could see what she lacked . . . something central which permeated; something warm . . . Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed.

—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. But . . . when Evans was killed . . . the panic was on [Septimus]—that he could not feel.

—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

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In its ambivalent portrayal of its heroine's marriage, *Mrs. Dalloway* participates in a modern trend in British and European social thought that combines antifoundational forebodings with pragmatic-conservative solutions. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* both expose the absence of a foundation (natural or god-given), where a foundation would give comfort, but hold out civilization—a product of human artifice—as a surrogate refuge.¹ Conrad's Marlow analyzes threats internal to a civilized society and individual. Bitterly aware of the hypocrisies on which the "whited sepulchre's" contract is founded, Marlow nonetheless holds fast to the "saving illusion" of civilization's decency, lest he become another Kurtz (Conrad 9, 77)—or Septimus Smith. Clarissa, for her part, holds fast to her union with Richard, though hardly unaware of his limitations, of Sally's and Peter's corresponding appeals, and her attraction to them. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which postdates *Mrs. Dalloway* by five years, asserts that civilization exacts neurosis as a price of membership. Freud accepts neuroses, rather like Marlow accepts disingenuousness, as a necessary and fair price.

The antifoundationalism *Mrs. Dalloway* shares with these other philosophical texts shows in its treatments of marriage and sexuality. Clarissa's love for Peter and memory of Sally's kiss explode any notion of female desire being monogamous and heterosexual, of marriage and its attendant obligations being "naturally" suited to women—the very prejudices that helped Woolf's Victorian forebears justify the sexes' separate matrimonial spheres on supposedly firm philosophical foundations. In part, *Mrs. Dalloway* also shares the pragmatic conservatism of these two texts, evincing support not only for the Dalloway marriage, but also for Clarissa's traditionally feminine role within it—the marriage's lack of foundational support notwithstanding. But only in part. Woolf's elusive, protean tone slips, almost imperceptibly, from sympathy to judgment, even to satire. In its less sanguine passages, the novel suggests that Clarissa's marriage (and its mirror, Septimus's) has been a self-betrayal. Ultimately, neither judgment of the Dalloway marriage—and thus neither general thematic suggestion about marriage itself—wins *Mrs. Dalloway*'s full support. Rather, the novel's moral energy tugs in competing directions, toward two compelling but irreconcilable judgments of Clarissa's exclusive partnership forged in the face of competing loves for Peter and Sally. *Mrs. Dalloway* effectively dramatizes the insoluble challenges posed to its contemporary readers by the broad social transformation—which I term the "crisis of intimacy"—through which they lived.

According to the pragmatic reading, the potential threats to the legitimacy and stability of the Dalloway union (Sally and Peter) ulti-

mately redound to its credit. Unlike Sally's love—a passing phase of late-adolescent lesbian enthusiasm—Richard's lasts, albeit in its feeble, clumsier way. Unlike Peter's love, Richard's is not oppressive. It provides Clarissa with space, both physically (a room and ominously narrow bed of her own) and psychically (in which to work through her problems, to live a private life). Far from a "dungeon" (77)—the privacy of its attic room notwithstanding—Clarissa's household can always be decorated with flowers; it is where her "atheist's religion" of life-love finds its fullest expression (78).

Further, according to the pragmatic reading, the essential soundness of the marriage institution shines more brightly in contrast to the other social praxes—psychiatry and religion—that *Mrs. Dalloway* unambivalently repudiates. Whatever his buffoonery, Richard is not Dr. Bradshaw, nor is he Doris Kilman; the comforts he provides are not their torments. His glaring flaws bolster the novel's implicit pragmatic argument: though marriage may *inevitably* entail disappointments, it is one institution, one social refuge—in the wake of the Great War's dislocations and in spite of (or in *light* of) the heart's polymorphous desires—deserving of loyalty. The passions that may perpetually have threatened Clarissa Parry's or Clarissa Walsh's psychic equilibrium are effectively compartmentalized by Clarissa Dalloway.

Finally, according to this sanguine line of interpretation, the heroine's healthful compartmentalizing is aided by the novel's compartmentalization—its bipartite rendering of the Clarissa/Septimus struggle to remain sane. The death of the "scapegoat" Septimus (Neuman 58, Froula 146, Henke 126), on such a reading, entails a ritual sacrifice, helping the heroine to cope with her various traumas, without succumbing either to rage or to melancholia (Henke 126). Even the author herself benefits, like Clarissa, from the sacrifice. Septimus's passing helps Woolf to shed a part of herself, and thus to sustain herself through the completion of *Mrs. Dalloway*, until she steps into the River Ouse a decade and a half later. Septimus serves the pragmatic function of siphoning off the dangerous forces at work in the psyches of both the fictional heroine and her creator.

But has Clarissa's psychological compartmentalization—to leave aside Woolf's biography—been as effective as such optimistic readings hope? Ample evidence suggests that the heroine not only loved, but continues to love, Peter more than her husband. Nor do the dystopic dimensions of the Dalloway marriage end with the loss Peter represents. *Mrs. Dalloway* may be a memento mori not just for victims of the war, but for lost homoerotic possibilities, suggested in my latter two epigraphs. The match in the crocus—in a different, freer society—might have ignited Clarissa into a more passionate

and confident woman. Should a deep connection be inferred between the illness in her heart and the lesbian desire she has largely suppressed for three decades?

Such an inference might seem arbitrary, if Septimus's tragedy did not mirror Clarissa's in its deepest psychosexual dimensions. Read merely as war trauma, Septimus's apparent inability to feel could result from delayed shell shock, as Bradshaw speculates. But Bradshaw is hardly trustworthy, and the depth of Septimus's attachment to Evans suggests anything but an inability to feel. Clarissa and Septimus, on the dystopic reading, have both lost an object of passionate same-sex love: she to social convention, he to death. Each has retreated in the wake of this socially proscribed sexual-emotional possibility into a legal, heterosexual union that cannot be fulfilling. The two psychic halves of the one protagonist are left with only improper places (their stunted memories) for their most central passions. Septimus might well be read as an end-in-himself, more than a functional figure in Clarissa's drama, his death sustaining her life. On such a reading, his passing is not only poignant in its own right, but less of a boon for Clarissa than a foreshadowing of one possible future for her. Septimus, after all, is blessed with a spouse even more solicitous than Clarissa's. But his suffering, psychosexual and otherwise, overcomes him: he succumbs to the disintegration that always threatens the heroine, sexually compromised like him.

Which reading—the pragmatic or dystopic—finds more support in the text? Critics disagree, both in psychological and in cultural-political terms. Lucio Ruotolo reads Richard as a good husband for Clarissa, who permits her the "unguarded moments" that promise psychic health and that mark Clarissa's transformation from an object of satire in the sketch "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" to one of sympathy in the novel.² Conversely, Elizabeth Abel sees civilization's resounding discontents for a bisexual woman like Clarissa epitomized in Peter Walsh's masculine intervention, his violent breaking of the tender moment—never to be repeated—between Clarissa and Sally. Indeed, Peter's intervention reads much like a concretization of the immaterial forces of repression (social codes, the superego) delineated in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Shirley Neuman expands Abel's largely psychological reading, interpreting *Mrs. Dalloway* as a revision of *Heart of Darkness*, fearful of the many "specters of domination" in a patriarchal civilization. According to Neuman, "horror" permeates Woolf's novel as thoroughly as Conrad's, condensing most painfully in Peter's intrusion.³ My reading aims to synthesize the insights of both critical camps into Woolf's portrayal of the Dalloway marriage, within the broad historical context of the aforementioned crisis of intimacy.

Much recent scholarship has treated modernist literature as a set of aesthetic responses to modern crises (war, political upheaval, loss of faith)⁴—a category to which *Mrs. Dalloway* clearly belongs. But too little scholarship has examined a central crisis of modernity: the radically shifting practice of intimate relations, marital and extramarital, homosexual and heterosexual, sexual and asexual, comprising "friendship" in its full range of possibilities. On what basis should such intimate relations be constituted? How lasting should they be? How public? No group of writers was better poised to address—or tellingly evade—such newly vital questions than Bloomsburians, who were an engine for the very social transformations upon which they commented.

The early twentieth century's crisis of intimacy had numerous interrelated components, from increases at once—paradoxically—in marriage and divorce, to redefinitions of sexuality, to anxieties about women's proper role within marriage and society (Phillips 169–79; Bristow 20–44). These tumultuous social developments held such promise that the crisis was also an opportunity—for feminists, gays, and others enjoying their liberation from Victorian mores, their increased freedom of movement by automobile and train,⁵ and their freedom as cultural consumers in a burgeoning market (with airplanes tracing indecipherable advertisements in the sky and radical experimentation transforming the arts). New forms of intimacy were emerging: between well-to-do husbands and wives living in smaller (nuclear) families with fewer servants than their Victorian forebears⁶; between same-sex couples testing the fluid boundaries of friendship and romance; between individuals like Clarissa Dalloway who struggled to see their intimate lives as narratives over which they could exert some troubled control, as self-authoring subjects. Confluent with these emerging conceptions of intimacy and the self, myriad currents of reactionary and liberatory energies swept through popular and high culture, vying to define the national sentiment. *Mrs. Dalloway* plunges into contemporary debates with a combination of philosophical radicalism, social pragmatism, and intimations of nihilistic despair, the startling paradoxes of which have not yet been fully appreciated.

The novel's philosophical radicalism lies in two areas: its broadly Freudian conception of sexuality and its representation of Clarissa's decentered self-authorship in love. Its political ambivalence—its vacillation between sympathetic and satiric regard of the marriage and Clarissa's role within it—can be traced in its protean tone. Throughout its vacillations, however, and suggesting that its pragmatic support of the marriage carries decisive weight, *Mrs. Dalloway* maintains a core liberal and Bloomsburian value in the sanctity that it grants Clarissa's private life.

In its radical conception of (bi)sexuality, the novel resonates with the pioneering work of Freud and previous sexologists, as a critique of two intertwined, widespread prejudices against homosexuality, one philosophical and one moral. The philosophical prejudice, treated at length in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, assigns a reproductive teleology to sexual desire. According to the prejudice, sexual desires that diverge from this purported teleology—chief among them, same-sex desires—are unnatural. Unnaturalness, abnormality, and moral despicability (even criminality) get yoked together, as the philosophical urge to classify and essentialize slides into a moral urge to normalize.⁷

Sexology intervenes by exploding each of these three traits—unnaturalness, abnormality, and moral degeneracy—speciously assigned to same-sex desire.⁸ Homosexual desire can be no less "natural" than heterosexual desire, Freud argues in *Three Essays*, if normal, genital-based adolescent heterosexual desire is itself a conglomerate of multiple infantile desires, which are combined in the process of coming to sexual maturity and can come apart in analysis as well as in practice. Since all sexual subjects are polymorphously perverse, the idea of "normal" desires (whose object is the opposite sex and whose aim is genital) being "natural" seems hollow.

Even the concept of "normality"—defined as monogamous heterosexuality—gives way to the Freudian and broader sexological critique. Confessional memoirs, case studies, and other research compiled by Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, J. A. Symonds, Karl Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Iwan Bloch, and others reveal a range of "perversions" to be far more widespread than common assumptions would allow.⁹ The line between normality and abnormality grows blurry.

Thus Freud, with his fellow researchers and radical theorists, assaults the philosophical prejudices against same-sex and other "perverse" desires. Indeed, for many of Woolf's contemporary thinkers on sex, the "scientific" prejudices against bisexuality and abnormal desires (with their specious invocations of "naturalness") and the moral prejudices (with their accusations of degeneracy) stood and fell together. But such was not the case for the self-hating homosexual Otto Weininger, whose 1903 *Sex and Character* argues that all people abide in a permanent bisexual condition, with vestigial traits of the other sex (visible in men's nipples and women's facial hair), but that such traits should be engineered out of their personalities, so that the platonic types of man and woman can be realized in society. Because of his eccentricity, Weininger usefully exemplifies the tenuous connections between the reigning philosophical assumptions and moral judgments against which Woolf, Freud,

and other sexual radicals contended. His paradoxical embrace of antiessentialism and reactionary politics illustrates how difficult it was for thinkers to formulate an internally consistent response to the tangle of problems exposed by the early twentieth century's increasingly visible homosexual culture. *Mrs. Dalloway's* pragmatic embrace of marriage, even in the face of its explosively post-Victorian conception of sexuality, embodies the same paradox as Weininger's thought—albeit in a much less violent way. For other establishment and antiestablishment thinkers, for critics on the right and the left, the paradoxes and opacities of the crisis of intimacy inspired debates of comparable complexity.

Woolf's novel enters these debates, first of all, by depicting sexuality as fluidly as the most radical sexologist would. Its heroine exemplifies Weininger's theory of permanent bisexuality; Clarissa is a tangle of paradoxes, masculine and feminine at once. Her posture is repeatedly described as upright; she "stiffens," waiting for a van to pass (4); she slices "like a knife through everything" (8), recalling the phallic symbol associated with Peter; if she "could have had her life over again," she thinks, "she would have been . . . interested in politics like a man; very dignified" (10); she sees her face in the mirror as "pointed, dart-like, definite" (37) and her own personality as "rigid" (76). When Peter brandishes his pocket knife, she counters with a sequence of two rival phalluses: scissors and then a needle, for mending her dress (41, 44). These images represent only the beginning of the masculine-Clarissa motif in the novel. Yet she derives her greatest joys from attending to the domestic sphere: shopping, organizing a party, receiving flowers from her husband. She loves, in turn—or wonders whether she loves—three people: two men and Sally. Moreover, Sally is interested in politics like a man, with her socialistic utopianism, her interest in Plato and Shelley, her teacherly guidance of Clarissa's reading. All of these romantic relations cast Clarissa in a feminine light.

Such a feminine light, moreover, flatters female characters, considering how two women cast in a masculine light—Millicent Bruton, with her "erect," "ramrod bearing," and manly interest in politics (111, 180); Doris Kilman, with her unbridled lesbian desire and domineering sanctimony—seem monstrous for it. Their very names—"brute" and "kill"—suggest the violence and horror with which the novel frequently associates such masculine womanliness. How, then, could any masculine woman in *Mrs. Dalloway* not bear some taint of Kilman's monstrosity; how could androgyny, in any female character, not be a frightening specter?

Beyond the playful contradictions of Clarissa's upright housewifeliness, for example, numerous passages suggest that her

traces of androgyny reveal a frozen state of development.¹⁰ "Fear no more the heat of the sun," Clarissa counsels herself more than once, as if, in preparing mentally for mortality, she merely continues her decades-long avoidance of heat and passion, of the *élan vital*. She remembers, "through some contraction of this cold spirit, [having] failed [Richard] . . . again and again" (31). Peter calls her "cold, heartless, a prude" (8). In a private tirade, she excoriates love as scathingly as religion: "Love and religion! thought Clarissa . . . how detestable they are!" (126). This sounds suspiciously like the language of a woman in retreat.

Septimus Smith's androgyny carries similar suggestions of arrested development or maladjustment. On the one hand, his metaphorically feminine qualities speak well to his compassion and gentleness: his Christ-like suffering, his concern for the trees, his participation with Rezia in making hats. On the other hand, though, it is during his states of most severe distraction—bordering on disintegration—that these feminine qualities emerge most intensely. They are anything but signs of what *A Room of One's Own* calls a genius's "incandescent mind," possessed of male and female brilliance in healthy equilibrium (57).

But the unsettling cases of Clarissa and Septimus by no means constitute the novel's final judgment on androgyny, as the example of Sally Seton demonstrates. Sally's sexual bravado (running naked down halls), her voracious intellectual daring as a reader of political philosophy (implicitly a deep rebuke to the drawing room Victorian female), her brandishing of a cigar (a symbol no subtler than Peter's knife), can at worst be called childish and at best intoxicating. Feminine and masculine traits circulate in and out of both male and female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, carrying wildly divergent moral connotations, depending on circumstances: such is the essence of the novel's sexual antiessentialism.

Nor is Sally the only woman in *Mrs. Dalloway* who comprises psychic contradictions and seems admirable for it. Clarissa, the same woman whom Peter calls "cold" and who terms love "detestable," treasures the sensation of the match burning in the crocus as a precious gift. Merely entering a florist's shop surrounds her with metaphorical heat, as "every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely". The *élan vital* surges through her, in the midst of "delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac . . . masses of carnations . . . roses, irises"—a collective image of overwhelming, feminized fecundity (13). The same heroine is not only masculine and feminine by turns, but hot and cold by turns. So fluid, moreover, are the connotations that *Mrs. Dalloway* attaches to any trait, that even coldness can be associated with sexual possibility: Clarissa "could remember going cold with

excitement" at the thought of Sally's proximity "and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy . . . with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light" (34). Paradoxes, in other words, saturate representations of her sexuality, whether at the level of one-word motifs or extended passages.

The celebrated attic scene highlights Clarissa's irresolvable contradictions,¹¹ as well as the novel's commitment to paradox and fluidity, not merely as stylistic gestures, but as epistemological paths. At midday, says the narrator, "women must put off their rich apparel" (31). But no unitary essence lies beneath the "apparel," however tantalizing its "putting off" may be. Next to Clarissa's bed, perhaps the initial clue to her sexuality, lies Marbot's *Memoirs*, into which she has "read deep[ly]"—the modifier "deep" suggesting her own psychological reaches. Even this initial clue is opaque. Marbot's military account might stir Clarissa's genuine, but thwarted, martial-masculine impulses. Or it might be a daydream only, a longed-for but impossible release from the femininity that imprisons Clarissa because it thoroughly constitutes her. Further complicating the paradox, the narrator specifies Marbot's "retreat from Moscow" (31). "Retreat" carries negative connotations and suggests that Clarissa's self-removal to the attic may reveal her own weakness. Yet, in a novel of consciousness like *Mrs. Dalloway*, an inheritor of the Jane Austen and George Eliot tradition of moral growth via introspection, what could be nobler than a scene of such extensive self-reckoning—complete with a moment before a mirror—than Clarissa's time with her reading and herself?¹²

Yet the central insight yielded by her introspection—the match in the crocus—itself refuses fixed meaning. Clarissa can tell herself, "No, the words ['She is beneath this roof!'] meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion." But immediately thereafter, Clarissa will feel "the old feeling . . . come back, as she . . . began to do her hair"—the image of doing her hair links her present palpitations to her "ecstasy" at Bourton where the rooks flaunted (34). Much of the attic scene's retrospective narration suggests the authenticity of the "old feeling" and Clarissa's evasiveness in denying it. "All that evening [at Bourton] she could not take her eyes off Sally"—very like a woman in love. "They sat up till all hours of the night talking"—very like two women in love (33). But Sally's reappearance, thirty-three years later, as a rotund mother apparently quite pleased with herself and her five boys, suggests how dispensable to her, in the long run, was "the most exquisite moment of [Clarissa's] whole life" (35). Perhaps, then, the moment should be dispensable to Clarissa too; perhaps her marriage is where she belongs psychologically; perhaps only a man could satisfy her as

a permanent partner. The moment in the garden, "exquisite" as it was, may reveal nothing permanent or necessary about the heroine's sexuality.

Freud insists, after all, that the sex instinct is not unitary, but suggests that healthy equilibrium can be achieved when desires assume "normal," heterosexual objects and aims.¹³ (On the topic of sexuality, as on that of life in civilization more broadly, Freud could combine antifoundational ontology with pragmatic-conservative politics.) Nowhere is the multiplicity of Clarissa's mind better demonstrated than in its fluctuating choice of sexual object, "sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman . . . confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly . . . she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt" (32).

"Undoubtedly" is a strong word to describe a mind so fluid; perhaps Clarissa's longing for close, confessional—erotic—contact with a woman is, after all, a crucial and perdurable feature of her psyche. In this case, a lifelong monogamous commitment—morally, emotionally, and juridically speaking—to one man might make sense for Clarissa only as an adjustment to rigid bourgeois conventions. It might constitute a deep self-betrayal, condoned by the author—if at all—only from a sense of its necessity.

Can a heroine be right not to have pursued a woman she admires, who bestowed on her a "present . . . infinitely precious" of fuller self-awareness (35)? Can she be right not to have married a man she loves more than her husband? Such questions, by design, haunt the novel, though they are impossible to phrase satisfactorily, since they beg other questions, in endless regress. Asserting whom she loves most authentically requires a definition of love, yet Clarissa worries over this very term. "But this question of . . . falling in love with women," Clarissa wonders in the attic, "take . . . her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had that not, after all, been love?" (32). The narrator marshals considerable evidence that the question should be answered in the affirmative and even follows it with another rhetorical question—"what was this except being in love?" (35)—but provides no definite answer. Richard's heart fairly bursts with feeling as he hands roses to his wife, and much seems to be communicated on an unspoken level—but the words "I love you" announce themselves only by their absence (115–18). Wilde's form of love dared not speak its name in its time; while numerous shades of love—including some that are socially acceptable—dominate *Mrs. Dalloway's* thematic explorations, its characters nonetheless have continual difficulty speaking the name of their own hearts' desires. Their inarticulateness implicitly chastens readers who would formulate definite distinctions between the characters' true and misguided affections.

This principle of uncertainty applies both to Septimus and to Clarissa. Whether Rezia is a fit partner for Septimus can never be fully ascertained. His disintegration may result largely from his settling on a partner of inappropriate gender—or it may result from a combination of powerful forces, including his war trauma, that cannot be so easily specified. In this context of contingency and necessarily limited knowledge, the burden of proof, where the Dalloway marriage is concerned, may lay more heavily on its detractors than on its supporters. Septimus disintegrates, and Clarissa does not; the question "why" presumes at least some credit to her marriage. We know, after all, how valuable her privacy is to Clarissa, how stingy a spouse Peter would likely have been in granting it to her, how generous (perhaps unthinkingly) Richard is. We know how dearly Woolf wanted women, especially women artists, to have rooms of their own in which to imagine, and the financial means to do so, unhampered by fear or bitterness. Admittedly, Woolf hoped women could find such means independent of matrimony,¹⁴ and admittedly, Clarissa is not a writer. But the hostess-heroine is certainly an artist figure, and her marriage provides her not only with the means to host, but with the space in which to imagine herself into being, the opportunity continually to renarrate her own life story.

Even beyond her self-invention, we sense—in the care she dedicates to giving a party for important people, in the delight she takes in masses of flowers, the concern she demonstrates for the food she'll serve, for her table settings, for her dress—how important material comforts are to her well-being. (The same seems true for the older Sally, despite her dashing youthful brush with penury.) We recognize—from the repeated mentions of her heart, her illness—how vulnerable a creature Clarissa is, how in need of protection and stability (financial, social, etc.). We sense that her capacity for passionate attachment carries seeds of danger as well as seeds of ecstasy and self-discovery. We recognize how many of her basic needs only Richard can meet. Finally, the historical conditions attending *Mrs. Dalloway's* conception suggest some likely motive on the part of the author—psychically frail herself, dependant on a husband for comfort and stability, perhaps not eager to court society's scorn as a radical in every way—for supporting marriage on both pragmatic and moral grounds.

In the twenties, the nuclear family (such as the Dalloway family) emerged as a major social phenomenon, yet, paradoxically, it was an especially difficult time for such families. The war left a third of England's young men deranged or dead. Divorce rates rose for familiar war-related reasons.¹⁵ Popular presses responded to these disturbing facets of postwar life with a vigorous defense of conservative, family values. Gender discourses, even within feminism, tended

to exaggerate, rather than downplay, differences between the sexes (Smith, Introduction 2; Woolf, *A Room* 88). On a political extreme, eugenics movements declared the protection of marriage to be a primary goal (Phillips 179). Among more conventional forms of activism, motherhood campaigns sprang up in answer to declining population growth (Smith, "British Feminism" 47). Hence one of modern society's great paradoxes—the simultaneous popularity of marriage and divorce—emerged at the level of citizens' intimate lives.

Given the broad resurgence of traditional values, the twenties were not a propitious time for a writer—particularly one, like Woolf, already associated with Bloomsbury's unconventional mores—to be perceived as hostile to institutions like marriage and family.¹⁶ Such an environment may have been well-suited, though, to the nonradical, even pro-establishment, strains in Woolf's intellectual temperament.¹⁷ For her, as for other Bloomsburians like Forster, the political did not necessarily equal the personal: categories like "suffragette," "homosexual," "feminist," and perhaps even "woman," with whatever crude accuracy they may have described someone's sympathy with a cause, were nevertheless felt as impositions on the imaginations of iconoclastic artists who "[did] not believe in Belief" (Forster 65). In place of "Belief" in impersonal causes, however enlightened, figures like Forster and Woolf—and characters of theirs, from Rickie Elliot¹⁸ and Margaret Schlegel to Orlando and Clarissa—substituted "personal relationships" and self-narration (Forster 65), with its inevitable lurches, gaps, and psychosexual lacunae. Literary heroines like Clarissa, as sociologist Anthony Giddens comments, contribute signally to Western societies' broad reimagining of love.

With the expansion of economic and educational opportunities, Victorian families evolved from large, materially beleaguered groups toward the modern nuclear family. Since the 1880s, use of contraception had expanded and the influence of evangelism had waned; English women married in 1925—the year of *Mrs. Dalloway's* publication—had, on average, 2.21 children. They had space and time, such as their mothers and grandmothers could not have conceived, to make their married, their private and intimate lives, a subject of free speculation, self-assertion, doubt, and reconsideration.¹⁹ In mid-nineteenth-century England, by contrast, the typical mother lived a grueling life, producing on average ten children through her fortieth year. Four of the children would not reach adulthood: even in the absence of war, mortality decimated families. Constantly nursing her young, barred from financial inheritance, the mother was wholly dependent on her spouse, her betrothal defined by practical duties more than a romantic quest (Davidoff and Hall 323).

For late-Victorians like George Eliot, radical enough to treat divorce and female independence, and for moderns like Woolf, re-

sponding to the harrowing euphoria of the crisis of intimacy, opportunities for freely pursued romantic love introduced the idea of narrative into a heroine's life (Giddens 39–40). Romance itself became a form of storytelling, in conjunction with rising literacy rates and the novel's increasing prominence as a form of popular entertainment and instruction.²⁰ Individual self-definition—as opposed to the collective self-definition of the feminists with whom Woolf ambivalently identified—not only became a common pastime, especially for the educated, leisured classes, but one they practiced with meticulous care. As the bourgeoisie more and more often graduated to rooms of its own, it developed a desperate commitment to privacy²¹—even while sex gradually became a topic of wider public discussion. Intropective late-Victorians and moderns came face to face with sexual desires as defining features of self, regardless of Woolf's or Forster's distaste for identity politics.

Admittedly, much suggests that Woolf's sexually ambiguous heroine is beleaguered, that her self-narration is far from a Pollyannaish tale of full liberation. The novel's opening sentence—"Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (3)—introduces her as a married subject. Only three sentences later is "Clarissa" supplied as the name of the missing self beneath the wife. Her name indicates not only to the reader, but to Clarissa herself, how insubstantial, in her married state, her own identity has become. The heroine ponders herself "being . . . invisible," her "being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (11). Three decades prior to this episode of derealization, her father, Justin Parry, had hovered over her adolescent—and life-altering—adventures in intimacy, parrying Sally's charm with his disapproval of her improprieties and also warding off his daughter's first male suitor. "I often wish I'd got on better with your father," the older Peter ominously tells Clarissa. She replies, biting her tongue for saying it, "But he never liked anyone who—our friends," suggesting the full extent of the blocking role played by the father (42). The given name "Justin"—perhaps an ironic play on the justice he did not mete out to Clarissa—appears in conjunction with "Parry," but the first and last names "Clarissa Parry" never appear together. At the level of her name, the heroine has been exiled from a family in whose identity she never fully shared, into a marriage that subsumes her individual identity into its corporate whole.

Clarissa, furthermore, is riddled with blind spots and evasions, suggesting her weaknesses and withdrawals to be both physical and psychic. Peter's absence from her household has not left him absent from her thoughts; she has never ceased to be aware of the life she might have lived with him. Thus, "she would still find herself arguing in St. James's Park, still making out that she had been right—and

she had too—not to marry him" (7). The curious interjection of support ("and she had too")—from the omniscient narrator? speaking on behalf of the community? from a different part of Clarissa's mind than the rest of the sentence describes?—serves more to highlight the fragmentary nature of her internal argument than to suggest its hope of being resolved.

Therefore, married though she be, she is not beyond jealousy at the thought of losing Peter to another woman: "she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish; and then the horror" of the news of his marriage (8). That his own (rumored) betrothal, so many years after hers, should strike her as a violent assault upon her very heart, says more about her emotional susceptibility than about the recklessness of his behavior. Therefore, she treats him with a combination of effrontery and affection (the former reminiscent of Millicent Bruton), mentioning her party, "Which I shan't ask you to," then addressing him as "My dear Peter," and indeed achieving the "delicious" effect for which the salutation is intended (41). Her confusing treatment of him mirrors her internal confusion and forgetfulness: "Now I remember how impossible it was ever to make up my mind—and why did I make up my mind—not to marry him?" (41).

Nor is she forgetful only where such large questions are concerned. When the door first opens on Peter's visit to her, "for a single second she could not remember what he was called! so surprised she was to see him, so glad, so shy . . . to have [him come] unexpectedly" (40). How could she have forgotten the name of a man who haunts her thoughts and whom even Sally thought she should have married? Claims to have been "surprised" and "shy" at his arrival are transparently disingenuous excuses for her memory lapse. Peter's visit is "unexpected" only because "she had not read his letter" (40). That the precise moment of his visit catches her off guard is plausible, but that the existence of his letter fails to warn her of his likely and imminent visit is not plausible. Her willful avoidance of his letter reveals how far from innocent is her forgetting of his name. Beleaguered and oppressed by outside forces as Clarissa is, she is also a victim of her own repression.

She psychologically dissociates herself not only from the man who would have been her husband, but from the daily life of the man who is her husband. "She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians" (120), reports the narrator, in a satirical tone reminiscent of "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street"—but a satire that retains affection for a heroine who loves her husband for his "adorable, divine simplicity." The affection dissipates, however, and Clarissa comes to seem more deserving of the appellation "simple" than her spouse:

"Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen . . . no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)" (120). At times, the novel's satirical treatment of Clarissa justifies Millicent Bruton's condescending attitude toward her. *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests that Doris Kilman may be correct (implicitly) to interpret Clarissa's weaknesses of character sociologically, to assign the hostess to "the most worthless of all classes—the rich, with a smattering of culture . . . expensive things everywhere" (123).

The heroine, in other words, does not deserve credit for confronting her own crises of intimacy and negotiating her somewhat anachronistic—Victorian—familial and social role with unflinchingly clairvoyant introspection and heroic political awareness. But a reading that focused only on her satirical treatment by her author, and not her valorization, would be incomplete. Clarissa's determined pursuit of joy, her generous compassion to herself and others, her capacity for genuine self-examination and philosophical wondering, and her ability to allow herself to feel a range of emotions, even painful ones, all confer upon her self-narration—despite its blind spots and dissociations—a full measure of nobility. Since these character strengths flourish within the context of her marriage, they also suggest a positive answer to the question Sally poses to Peter at the party, the question upon which so much of the novel's moral weight rests: "And the marriage had been . . . a success?" (188). Though Septimus's union with Rezia, by contrast, does not achieve equal long-term success, this fact need not amount to a negative authorial judgment on marriage per se. It may instead be an admission that marriage can perform only so much of a pragmatic function, contain and help heal only so much grief.

The heroine's determination to live joyously announces itself at the very beginning of her largely self-narrated adventure. "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself," opens the novel. Her first act is not merely physical, but one of self-description, of saying what she will do. So she plunges—a verb of great adventurous spirit—into her day. Her own doors being unhinged in preparation for her current party remind her of door hinges at Bourton squeaking and intimate the danger of Clarissa herself becoming unhinged.²² Her plunge is all the nobler and braver because it entails a psychological risk. The mobile narrator begins the novel largely in Clarissa's mind, making no ironic interjections; by virtue of position and tone, the narrator endorses and ennobles Clarissa's venture.²³ The heroine's self-authorship, in the opening scene, is marked by her willed ecstasy, a response to daily experience at once poignant and admirable for its willed quality, its suggestion of Clarissa's psychic complexity, with one part of her encouraging another into joy.

Her determination to celebrate life, to treat not only her marriage but her existence as a romance, reaches philosophical—nearly religious—proportions on multiple occasions. In a moment of self-doubt, wondering whether she should have married Peter, she imagines herself a child and grown woman at once, "coming to her parents . . . holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said 'This is what I have made of it! This!'" (43). Her sense that her life is not merely a given, but something to be "made," secures her footing as a modern heroine, an artist of more than just the hostess's realm.

Nor is her life-artistry lacking in intellectual rigor, whatever the deficiencies of her geographical knowledge. In a moment of superpersonal doubt, she determines "to go deeper, beneath what people said (and their judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!)" revealing her determination to be not only emotional (her willed ecstasy) but intellectual (skeptical, iconoclastic):

[I]n her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? . . . Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence . . . and she felt only if they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering . . . for the sake of offering, perhaps. (122)

The "life" motif in *Clarissa*'s thinking links her to her author. From her diary entries to her long and short fiction, Woolf continually returns to the elusive subject of "life." For her it is no meaningless abstraction, but the energy, or principle, which it is the novelist's duty to capture; the failure of modern fiction lies, as much as anything, in its insufficient interest in this subject.²⁴ *Clarissa* seeks directly what Woolf seeks—as a matter of high aesthetic-moral principle—to represent. Moreover, *Clarissa* seeks it in a manner deserving of rich approbation, by Bloomsburian lights.

She seeks life, first of all, on atheistic grounds. As she bows her head "beneath the influence [of life]," she refuses false ontology: "not for a moment did she believe in God; but all the more, she thought . . . must one repay in daily life" (29). Atheism was central to Bloomsbury; not only as a dogma but as a sensibility, it separated them from their pious but—in their view—less spiritually receptive parents. Numerous studies have noted Bloomsburians' paradoxical unworldly worldliness—with their atheism and hard work as striving, ultimately successful artists constituting their worldliness, but their mysticism, their commitment to the aesthetic, the private, the inti-

mate, marking them as unworldly. Bloomsbury's parents, by contrast, were marked by worldly unworldliness, with their protestations of religiosity (glum and largely hypocritical, in their children's eyes) constituting their would-be unworldliness, and their keen interest in politics and social position—combined with their obliviousness to aesthetic values—revealing their deep-set, imaginatively impoverished worldliness.²⁵ In her capacity for religious sentiment—in its most genuinely rapturous sense, before the physical splendors of London and daily life—without the comfort of false dogma, Clarissa demonstrates a worldly unworldliness that would make any Bloomsburian proud. "What she loved," says the narrator, "was this, here, now, in front of her" (9), the sequence of deictics demonstrating Clarissa's power to immerse herself in the absolute present.

That she resolves to make offerings for the sake of offerings, or in Peter's words, to do good for the sake of goodness (see my first epigraph), puts her in the company of the Group's patron philosopher G. E. Moore. *Principia Ethica* struggles, in the absence of religious foundations, to justify philosophically the value it places on friendship and aesthetics²⁶ and does a less articulate job than Clarissa of accepting the inevitably nonfoundational nature of its reasoning. Even without the help of a strict foundation or dogma, theological or personal, Clarissa feels impelled to "repay" (29), indicating—at least at the level of impulse—how generous her approach to life can be.

Clarissa also seeks life, to her further credit, in the otherness of others. "There she was," concludes the novel, in a celebration of Clarissa's radiance to the eyes of Sally and especially Peter. She radiates otherness to her admiring onlookers: she is wholly herself, extant beyond category. "It is Clarissa," Peter says, and there is nothing more for the omniscient narrator to say, other than to concur with Peter's appreciation of Clarissa's irreducibility (194). How fitting, given her power to inspire such a reaction in Peter and Sally, that Clarissa should recognize the value of apprehending other people with such a generous awareness of their uniqueness. She feels "quite continuously a sense of [the] existence" of people in Bayswater and elsewhere (122). At her party, she sees her guests and thinks "there was Professor Brierly" or "there was old Aunt Helena" (176, 178), foreshadowing the language with which Peter will note her appearance later. The Dalloway marriage enables both partners to flourish in their separateness, as a Walsh marriage likely would not; Clarissa's approach to life grants the same boon to many.

For her, such an approach stems not only from instinct, but from principle. "Why creeds and prayers," she wonders, watching her neighbor move away from the window, "when . . . that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant, whom she

could see going from chest of drawers to dressing table. . . . The supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved . . . was simply this: here was one room, there another" (127). Clarissa's atheism, as a Bloomsburian's should, aims to encompass a greater sense of mystery, a greater sensitivity to a variety of traditionally religious sensations and insights, than institutional religion would often cultivate. Existence, precisely in its diversity, strikes her as miraculous in a way no fossilized creed could express. The "rooms" that she and her neighbor separately occupy stand for the unique importance inherent in each of their lives.

So morally conscientious is this atheist-heroine, though, that she battles against her own dislike of Kilman and her sanctimonious "creed." Clarissa accuses herself harshly: "It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster . . . this hatred, which . . . made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well . . . quiver." She recognizes how moral attitudes (dislike) and aesthetic possibilities (for pleasure, beauty) interpenetrate. So she redirects her own thought patterns, in the manner of an Austen or Eliot protagonist engaged in the noblest self-reckoning. "For it was not her [Kilman] one hated," muses Woolf's conscientious heroine, "but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered into itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman" (12). Given Doris's blatantly unappealing qualities, and the threat she represents to Clarissa's relationship with Elizabeth, such self-correction on Clarissa's part—separating her judgment of an individual from the individual in question—demonstrates a rare moral capacity.

The large number of judgmental characters in the novel—Sally and Peter, Kilman and Bruton, Holmes, Justin Parry, even passersby on the street, guests at the party—reveals the rarity of Clarissa's virtue and suggests Richard's virtue as well. One of the novel's least judgmental characters, Richard suits his morally conscientious wife quite well as a mate. On the rare occasion when he does take a strong dislike to another person, he reveals his perspicacity, as well as his agreement with his wife's and the novel's moral attitude: Clarissa "did not know what it was—about Sir William [Bradshaw]; what exactly she disliked. Only Richard agreed with her, 'didn't like his taste, didn't like his smell'" (183). The convergence of perceptions between husband and wife, where such an ideologically crucial villain as Bradshaw is concerned, speaks well for their marriage and confirms the gift Clarissa claims of "knowing people almost by instinct" (9).

Her combination of accurate instinct and self-correcting thoughtfulness largely mitigates whatever snobbery she may be guilty of and suggests that her decisions pertaining to human relations—such

as her choice of husband—may well be wise, whatever her difficulty in articulating their rationale. In fact, though she may struggle to recall why she did not marry Peter—much as she “[does] not know” what disturbs her about Bradshaw—Peter himself confirms the fitness of her decision. “But it would not have been a success, their marriage,” thinks Peter in his hotel room. “The other thing, after all, came so much more naturally” (156). The whiff of scandal attached to Peter’s pursuit of a divorce for Daisy only intensifies, by contrast, the respectability of marriage itself, particularly that of the Dalloways.

Whatever the value of Clarissa’s inarticulate instincts, her self-definition involves considerable introspection and articulation. The attic scene, already discussed in some detail, reveals the range of her curiosity about herself, others, and the meanings of her interactions with them. Among the many movements of her mind in the attic, the many profound questions she engages, the following seven—three concerning Sally, two concerning Peter, and two concerning herself—reveal her introspective rigor. Clarissa struggles to define love by reference to specific experience: “Had not that . . . been love?” (32). She attempts to recall what Sally was really like, with her “amazing gift . . . personality” (33). She struggles to define the nature of her “love”—if that was indeed her feeling—for Sally. Was it actually as “disinterested” as Clarissa claims? Was it a clue—is it still a clue—to the fundamentally different nature of Clarissa’s feelings for men and for women? That Clarissa does not answer these questions points more to their insolubility than to her incapacity. Moving to the subject of Peter, Clarissa begins by resenting his intrusion on the Sally kiss. But then she immediately recalls how much she “owe[s]” her erstwhile suitor (36). Her mind revolves, characteristically, from judgment of another—even where that other has been genuinely in the wrong—to compassion and gratitude. Likewise, in the novel’s initial scene, the heroine thinks that she and Peter “might be parted for hundreds of years,” but still “some days, some sights” could “bring him back to her calmly, without . . . bitterness” (7). From alienation to connection with others—and back again to separation—Clarissa’s mind moves, as she moves, an individual in society, largely constituted by her relations with others, but at the same time irreducibly herself. Finally, in the attic, having given thought to Sally and Peter in turn, she gives thought to herself. Looking in the mirror, she acknowledges—bravely, perceptively—how fictional her social self is, “how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one center.” Freud’s picture of the self is similarly skeptical; the heroine’s intellectual temperament is Bloomsburian in more ways than one. Having made an effort to compose her reflected self, she wonders, “Now where was her dress?” (37). She proceeds to mend

the garment, a symbolic act of repairing into a coherent whole the social self that she knows to be a fiction. Without the comfort of a false ontology—a belief in a unified psyche—she bravely descends the stairs to greet the world again.

The attic scene encapsulates the heroine's intelligence as a self-authoring, morally responsible lover and woman. She regards Sally, Peter, and herself kindly, but without being uncritical. Sally, she thinks, was once, but is no longer, an object of her desire. Peter can be rude and egotistical—even to the point of "horror"—but has taught her much. Clarissa lacks a unified mind, perhaps also "something central which permeates," but is nonetheless—according to her own (accurate) testimony—"a radiancy no doubt in some [people's] lives . . . she had helped young people, who were grateful to her" (37).

As such a "radiancy," capable of balancing compassion for her friends with justified appraisal of their limitations, Clarissa allows herself to experience negative feelings in their full force. A death wish circulates through her—understandably, given her illness and given the preoccupation with mortality endemic to a war-torn society²⁷—but does not cancel her *joie de vivre*. Immediately after comforting the weeping Peter, she imagines—falsely, of course—that Richard's lunch with Lady Bruton constitutes an abandonment: "He has left me; I am alone forever" (47). This notion is no more permanent in Clarissa's mind than true objectively: her instinctive wisdom lies in her allowing the feeling to rise in her, then pass away. The sorrow enriches her experience, but because it passes, does not unduly weigh her down.

Mrs. Dalloway's philosophical radicalism, as I have been arguing, lies in two areas: its broadly Freudian picture of sexuality and its representation of the heroine's decentered self-authorship. Clarissa's mind exceeds what *A Room of One's Own* terms a "single state of being" (97): it revolves continually from judgment to compassion, from sorrow to joy, weariness to vibrancy, alienated independence to a sense of connection and social obligation. Whether Clarissa herself narrates these revolutions, or whether it is the third-person voice that renders her indirectly, is sometimes hard to discern. In these two interwoven textual strands—the inseparability of narrator from character, and the nonunity of said character—*Mrs. Dalloway* expresses its psychological-philosophical radicalism. All the while, Clarissa's effort to narrate her own "incompatible" self into being gains dignity by resisting Peter's condescending narration of her life. Interdependent narratives and counternarratives about the heroine dramatize the complexities and opacities of her humanness. Just as *Civilization and Its Discontents* accepts neuroses as the price of life in civilization, so *Mrs. Dalloway* accepts multiple "states of being" as

the necessary price of an androgynous-minded individual's life in a gender-bound body, in a complex society.

Because it combines a radical skepticism about sexuality and selfhood with a hard-won social pragmatism, particularly where marriage is concerned, the novel ends by emphasizing the successes of Clarissa's party—a married hostess's "offering for the sake of offering."²⁸ A large occasion, the party encompasses a range of effects and affects. News of Septimus's death temporarily darkens the affair, but Clarissa, after thought, comes to feel connected to her *alter ego*, speculating, "There was an embrace in death" (184). The Prime Minister—a unifying national symbol—graces the party. But then he departs, leaving an imprint of his importance in the chair—his vanished presence a physical reminder of the mortality shared by all guests. (The party assumes greater sobriety, even profundity—belying Peter's protestations of its triviality—for including such reminders.)

Nonetheless, the party can feel artificial even to its hostess. Clarissa "had this feeling of being something not herself" (170–71). Fortunately, though, such artificiality offers access to typically inaccessible realities: "every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another . . . being taken out of their ordinary ways . . . it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else . . . to go much deeper" (171). Lady Bruton's smaller gathering (replete with its own artificialities) had already signaled this happy possibility: it prompted Richard to surprise his wife with roses, to "go much deeper" than he might have otherwise upon returning home. Clarissa's party, too, achieves her goal of "[bringing] together" and "creat[ing]" connections between people (122): Peter and Sally, long connected by their mutual regard for the hostess, revel in one another's physical presence amid so many strangers and go "deeper" in conversation than they might in a less formalized and crowded setting.

Finally, what could better demonstrate the power of Clarissa's party to "combine" (122) than Richard's mystical apprehension of his daughter? "Her father had been looking at [Elizabeth]," begins one of the novel's final paragraphs, "and he had thought to himself, Who is that lovely girl? And suddenly he realized that it was his Elizabeth" (194). His initial defamiliarization—likely a function of the "unreality" that Clarissa notes as inherent to such gatherings—permits him to appreciate Elizabeth's otherness as a more routine encounter with her likely would not. In this moment, Richard experiences something of Peter's quasi-religious insight in sensing "there she [Clarissa] was" or something of Clarissa's insight in observing her neighbor turn off her lights in her separate room. This defamiliarization results in Richard's redoubled love for his daugh-

ter: "he had not meant to tell her, but he could not help telling her . . . he had wondered, Who is that lovely girl? And it was his daughter!" On the crest of his second wave of familial affection within one day, Richard is more articulate with Elizabeth than he was with Clarissa. His articulation of his feelings does indeed "make her [Elizabeth] happy" (194). In ways that she could neither have predicted nor controlled, Clarissa's party and the other members of her family mutually reinforce one another's value. The party creates an occasion for tenderness between father and daughter; Richard's expression thereof confers a crowning achievement on the party.

By setting up opportunities for defamiliarization, uncommon combinations of people, and even unpleasant reminders of mortality, the party generates healthy philosophical dynamism. Likewise, Clarissa's marriage—in the face of another, very different marriage that she might have made for herself—establishes opportunities for her own self-questioning, her psychic dynamism: her full humanity, as conceived in a postfoundational milieu. In the modern vein, she exercises her freedom of choice, opting for one imperfect life rather than another, never losing sight of the fact that her choice was—and remains—a choice that entails sacrifice, never taking refuge in the false comfort of a philosophy of inevitability or of religion.

She stares in the face her modern intellectual-moral predicament—her lack of foundations, the certainty of her death—and, unlike Septimus, maintains her radiancy amid her periods of depression. She eschews even the false comforts, the platitudes, of a celebrated contemporary "priest of science" (94). "Perhaps, after all, there is no God," muses Sir William Bradshaw. "He shrugged his shoulders. . . . Sir William had a friend in Surrey where they taught . . . a sense of proportion. There were, moreover, family affection; honor; courage; and a brilliant career" (101–02). Bradshaw lazily cites an unspecified acquaintance—perhaps a highly fallible "specialist" like himself—whereas Clarissa reaches her own conclusions. Bradshaw invokes "proportion"; Clarissa honestly experiences feelings from joy to terror. Bradshaw invokes "honor" while maintaining a rather heartless profession, too busy with his volume of patients to attend to any of them as individuals; Clarissa quietly incarnates honor by subjecting her hatred of Doris Kilman to severe introspection. Bradshaw invokes "family affection" while subjecting his wife, most likely without even realizing he does so, to "the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his" (100). The Dalloways, by contrast, achieve moments of genuine affection—amid their difficulties and differences—between husband and wife, father and daughter. No one Dalloway sinks, "water-logged," into the will of another.

Bradshaw, in other words, offers hollow, merely rhetorical solutions to the problem of lost foundations. Septimus, in stark con-

trast, can find no philosophical or psychological balm—apart from his fitful messianic delusions—for the complex wounds he has endured. But his *alter ego* Clarissa finds a happy medium between the doctor's pretensions and the patient's disintegration. She fashions a workable marriage and household, and a party that brings disparate people together, out of the potential chaos of her complex sexuality and her recognition that she might have lived a very different life. Of the numerous forms of intimacy around which she might have structured her life—at a time when the idea of intimacy was being radically reconceived—Clarissa chooses a marriage with clear limitations, but one that helps her to retain her individual integrity, her grace, her material well-being. The novel, on balance, celebrates her for doing so. *Mrs. Dalloway* revises Freud's and Conrad's combination of antifoundationalism and pragmatism, at times stepping beyond even Conrad's skepticism, by suggesting that Clarissa's and Septimus's marriages have been self-betrays. But the novel also belongs to the tradition, ultimately sharing the tradition's faith in the efficacy of human institutions like marriage, and articulating its own prayerful gratitude—in Clarissa's moment-by-moment rapture at ordinary experience—for the merely human, merely temporary significance of such experience.

Notes

1. The connections between Freud and Bloomsbury were many and deep. Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press published the standard English language editions of Freud's writings, translated by Lytton Strachey's brother James. James and his wife Alix were analyzed in Freud's Vienna home, during the fledgling and proselytizing years of psychoanalysis (also the decade of *Mrs. Dalloway*), when Freud's patients tended also to be his followers (see Meisel and Kendrick).
2. Froula and Henke also make use of the manuscript history of *Mrs. Dalloway*; each reads Clarissa sympathetically. Henke sees Clarissa's parties—facilitated by her marriage to Richard—as elaborate and beautiful offerings to her deceased parents (127–28). Froula, following Freud's "On Transience," reads *Mrs. Dalloway* as expressing a desire to build up what the war (and other tragic events) have destroyed, in Clarissa's personal experience as well as in broader civilizational terms.
3. See Abel (30–44) and Neuman (60–62), whose title I adapt in discussing "specters."
4. See Regnery's foreword and Panichas's introduction to the thirtieth-anniversary issue of *Modern Age: A Quarterly Review*. See Von Hallberg and Laity for a scholarly discussion focused on World War I.

5. See Branca for a broad examination of women's shifting social roles over the last several centuries (pages 100–10 cover technological and transportation issues).
6. McGregor discusses marriages and their challenges (83–84). Davidoff and Hall discuss family and gender politics (328–40).
7. See the first of Freud's *Three Essays*, "The Sexual Aberrations" (1–38).
8. Bristow accuses sexology—despite my praise for its antihomophobic energies—of failing to historicize its own work (15–16). Freud's antiessentialism goes further than that of his colleagues.
9. For a helpful summary of all these thinkers' contributions, see Bristow 20–44.
10. Schlack's Freudian reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* links the heroine's androgyny to her arrested development.
11. Minow-Pinkney explores psychic (in)stability in Woolf, in great depth.
12. See Booth on George Eliot and Woolf (1–26, 168–284).
13. The *Three Essays* circle continually around this point.
14. See *A Room of One's Own* (4, 22–23, 38, 93).
15. Horstman describes the gradual emergence of divorce, first among the upper classes, after its legalization with the 1857 Divorce Act (85–112).
16. Kent discusses the conservative tone of much interwar feminism (66–70).
17. *Night and Day*, for example, looks askance at political activism.
18. The protagonist of Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907).
19. See McGregor (80–90) for statistical analyses, Davidoff and Hall for examinations of domestic spaces and privacy (375).
20. Watt makes a similar argument about literacy and democratic self-definition in the eighteenth century. Building on his work, I claim that his description fits English life even more accurately after the 1870 Education Act.
21. See Gay (1: 445; 2: 3–4).
22. *The Oxford English Dictionary* traces the use of "unhinged," as a specifically psychological term, back to J. A. Noble in 1895 and, as a general reference to confusion or disorder, back to Defoe's *Crusoe* (1719).
23. Hillis Miller discusses the role of omniscient narration, as the voice of the community, in Woolf's aesthetic.
24. Woolf's "Modern Fiction" opposes the materialism of less accomplished English novelists to the spiritualism, or attention to "life," which marks the achievements of Joyce and the Russians.

25. I derive these paradoxes from various commentators on *Bloomsbury* and its prehistory, most notably from Rosenbaum (21–34, 161–75) and Levy (19–27).
26. See its sixth and final chapter for its paean to these values (183–225).
27. See Levenback on Woolf's treatment of war and its aftermath.
28. Froula thinks this "offering" has a specific object: not the "patriarchal Jehovah," but "a composite ancestral figure whose primary aspect is maternal" (127).

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